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# Paramilitary freelancers under fire on Nicaragua

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DECATUR, Ala.—Tommy Posey and a few fellow Vietnam veterans here and in Memphis have led double lives for more than a year, lives that Posey says they knew "could get us killed."

That is exactly what happened to a police officer and a flight instructor, two of Posey's comrades in a group called Civilian Military Assistance.

The two were shot down in a rebel helicopter over Nicaragua earlier this month, in what the Sandinista government called a combat situation.

Posey insists that his group has never gone to Central America to fight.

What they have done repeatedly since last fall, Posey said, is fly to Honduras to take clothing, rations and ammunition to anti-Sandinista guerrillas based in Honduras and to offer training to the rebels, called contras.

THE CONTRAS are "freedom fighters against communism, and we support them," Posey said.

His motley paramilitary group may have been prepared for the eventuality of members being killed in Central America, but the deaths stunned most Americans, including several government leaders.

Even as friends and relatives were trying last week to get the Nicaraguan government to return the bodies of the helicopter's pilot, James Powell III, 36, a Memphis flight instructor; and Dana Parker Jr., 36, a Huntsville, Ala., policeman, investigations were underway from Capitol Hill to the Huntsville Police Department.

Sen. James Sasser [D., Tenn.], who has traced to the CIA three airplanes used by Nicaraguan rebels and the helicopter flown by Powell, has called for an investigation.

SASSER WANTS to know if those craft and the airfields from which they took off—fields designated strictly for U.S. military exercises—were within or circumvented the \$24 million limit that Congress imposed on CIA spending to aid the Nicaraguan rebels.

Sasser press secretary Doug Hall said of Civilian Military Assistance, "The senator is disturbed about this type of activity, particularly because some of these people are members of National Guard units."

In light of the congressional concern, the Alabama National Guard ordered inventories of its armories in Decatur and nearby Huntsville to determine if equipment had gone to the civilian group.

"We have found no equipment missing," said Sgt. Norman Arnold, a National Guard spokesman.

HUNTSVILLE POLICE Chief Sal Vizzini has ordered an investigation of all police leaves of absence since he took office in 1980 to determine if anyone besides Parker took a leave to work with the group. Vizzini has not said what he would do with such information.

Posey, 38, a produce dealer whose anticommunist fervor has taken him to Honduras and El Salvador, said he welcomed all the investigations.

"We have nothing to hide and we've done nothing wrong," he said. "We're just Americans trying to help our neighbors fight communism."

Asked if he intends to return to Central America, Posey said, "Yes, sir. I'll go down again. We played it too safe in other places."

One such place, he believes, was Vietnam, where he fought as a marine.

"Yes, I'm still frustrated from Vietnam. We couldn't finish the communists off there. We should have gone all out to win in Vietnam, or if we had any doubt, we shouldn't have started it."

POSEY WAS interviewed by phone from Las Vegas. He traveled to the Soldier of Fortune Magazine convention there last Wednesday, all expenses paid, to receive heroism awards for Parker and Powell, given by the Phantom paratroop division.

"I don't think their deaths will be in vain," he said. "I believe our organization will grow because of this."

At the small Posey's Produce office along railroad tracks in Decatur, sitting in front of a wall calendar depicting Jesus talking with a

group of women and children, Patsy Posey echoed her husband's sentiment.

"The phone hasn't stopped ringing with people calling from all over the country," she said. "Most want literature about our group or application forms. We only had one negative call."

Civilian Military Assistance estimates its membership at 1,000. Mrs. Posey said she has mailed out "300 or 400 applications in the last two weeks."

POSEY'S FIRST trip to Central America, last fall, "was the first time he'd been gone more than a day or two in the 18 years since we were married, except for National Guard summer camp," she said. "I try to put it in the back of my mind that he could be killed down there."

She was asked if she thought it was worth the risk.

After a long pause, she replied, "Yeah, to an extent I do. . . . I know what Tom believes in, and you can't change him."

"Our biggest concern is communism spreading to the U.S. We don't want our children growing up under communism. Our forefathers fought for this country, so we should continue the fight if we have to."

In Decatur and nearby Flint City, where the Poseys live with their two sons and where Posey has been a city councilman, National Guard member and Little League baseball coach, not everyone agrees with Posey's stand. But few will speak out against him.

ONE WHO IS suspicious of Posey's claims of noncombat assistance is newspaper reporter Clinton Claybrook of the Decatur Daily. He was invited to do a story at Posey's house, where "I saw a ton and a half of small-arms ammunition, still in ammo boxes, in his son's bedroom," Claybrook said.

He said Posey indicated in an interview last year that he had fired a weapon and had at least witnessed combat on one side or the other of the Honduras-Nicaragua border.

Posey denied that, saying, "We had a fire demonstration in the bush, and we saw wounded soldiers but only at a hospital."

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